



Crater Health District
Helping Build Healthy Communities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**PETERSBURG HEALTHY LIVING AND LEARNING CENTER OPENS
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Local Partners Bring Health Information Service to Petersburg Library

(Petersburg, VA)—Petersburg residents can now access current and accurate health information at their local library. The Petersburg Healthy Living and Learning Center at the Petersburg Central Library will host a grand opening on October 1, 2012, in conjunction with National Health Literacy Month. The Center is the result of a partnership among the Library, Virginia Commonwealth University Massey Cancer Center and Crater Health District.

The purpose of the Center is to provide credible information on a variety of health topics and local health resources to a range of literacy levels. Low literacy is associated with a range of adverse health outcomes and contributes to the complexities of understanding health information. The Center is designed to empower community members to be proactive in their health management by providing accurate and reliable health information.

Located on the main floor of the library, the Petersburg Healthy Living and Learning Center will be staffed by specially trained librarians and health education specialists from each partner organization. The intent of the Center is to help Petersburg residents find information regarding their health concerns and connect them to health resources within the community. The Center is planning to form partnerships with local physicians who will be able to refer their patients for information that clarifies or expands upon the physician's discussions with their patients.

After conducting community townhalls, provider focus groups, and assessing health statistics; Massey recommended a model to address the health needs identified. The Petersburg Healthy Living and Learning Center is based upon similar Health Information & Advocacy @ Your Library programs which exist in several other Virginia public libraries.

"As Virginia's cancer resource, VCU Massey Cancer Center is focused on reducing the incidence and death from cancer for the citizens of the Commonwealth," said Mary Ann Hager, RN, MS, associate director for clinical services at Massey. "This is why we feel it is so important that Petersburg residents have reliable and easily accessible consumer medical information to help them better manage their health."

Each partner has provided in-kind services, resources and staff for the center. For example, the Petersburg Library has provided physical space and equipment for the Center. The Crater Health District has contributed grant writing expertise. Massey has provided training and advisory services through the Community Health Education Center (CHEC) and space on the Health Information & Advocacy @ Your Library website at <http://www.healthinformation.vcu.edu/petersburg.html>. Future goals include expanding the program through awareness, additional partnerships, and funding.

“We are committed to improving Petersburg’s health literacy,” says Wayne Crocker, director, Petersburg Public Library. “By providing accurate and reliable health information to community members and by connecting them with local health resources, we hope to better educate the Petersburg public about their health. The library is a familiar and accessible location that already serves as an information hub for the community, so involving the library in this partnership makes sense.”

“This Center will provide the community an opportunity to better understand health information that will allow individuals to empower themselves and ultimately improve their own personal health and wellness,” says Alton Hart, Jr., MD, MPH, Crater Health District director.

This initiative to improve health literacy and connect the community to needed resources is another example of how the City of Petersburg has been making substantial efforts to have a positive impact on the health of its citizens and employees. Other efforts include the Quality Circle Coalition and Petersburg Wellness Consortium.

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